A School for Administrators

A Report on the 1964 National Training Laboratory Summer Session

DONALD A. KLEMER

FOR THE PAST several years a training program for school administrators, business executives, and others responsible for group leadership has been held at Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine. Some of the ideas presented in the program will be of interest, although many will not be entirely new ideas to many of us who have encountered them in school administration courses. Some can be labelled "obvious" or "just plain common sense"—but I raise the question as to how often we actually apply them in our every day performance as administrators? Many of the ideas are the result of extensive research of "the obvious" by behavioral scientists. They provide some excellent new perspectives on our problems. Please do not discard them as "ivory tower" approaches. If examined seriously, and not defensively, they provide many fresh and exciting ways of dealing with some old and "insurmountable" problems.

Essentially the two-week Bethel Laboratory (and the similar laboratory for school administrators conducted by NTL at Lake Arrowhead, California, with UCLA and the Western Training Laboratory) provides an opportunity for an administrator to analyze and improve upon his effectiveness in dealing with, and through, people.[1] Basically, effectiveness, or lack of effectiveness in our particular jobs, hinges on how we are able to get people to work with and for us. We may be the brightest administrators

[1] In the 1940's, at M.I.T., Ronald Lippit and Kurt Lewin began to investigate the processes at work in groups. Their work sparked the NTL labs which now involve business leaders and educators.

Donald A. Klemer is Principal, Mather and Middlesex Junior High Schools, Darien, Connecticut.

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

in the world—but we can't do the job ourselves. A large part of our job is to get others to do their parts of the job effectively.

The Bethel program intentially isolates a group of about 85 school administrators up in the Maine woods at a small preparatory school unused in the summer. Here no one has a title nor any of the hardware of rank—in addition to being cut off from his telephone and his or her community. The vacuum is deliberate. Here, with the help of others in the program and the behavioral scientists attached to the group, there is an attempt to provide an apportunity for an administrator to make a major review of how he approaches his work in the "back home" situation.

Most of us lived in the school dormitory and had our meals together in the cafeteria in the building. The school administrators (mostly principals) kept together as a unit for their training, but there were innumerable opportunities to talk with business executives, psychologists, social workers, and others in another laboratory. Indeed, much of the best part of the experience was the interchange of ideas with individuals in the dormitory and at lunch. I roomed with an Indian doctor from Calcutta, who had spent a year of study in the field of Public Health at the University of Michigan.

The program for the administration group ran from 8:30 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. with some time between for recreation. We spent 60 per cent of our time in a training or "T" group of twelve people with two professional "trainers" attached. The purpose of this part of the program was to develop our skills in responding to group and individual behavior. We spent the remaining 40 per cent of our time in lecture-discussion groups and in role-playing situations where we attempted to apply theory to practical problems we all faced.

Questions

Among the questions we raised and discussed during the course of the program were the following:

- How do we, as individuals, deal with people?
- Who am I? What kind of feelings, attitudes, values, beliefs do I live by? How do they affect me and my performance as an administrator?

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

- Are we sensitive to the things that happen in groups—or are we "flying blind?"
- To what extent do we recognize the importance of our own feelings, and the feelings of the group, in determining group and individual behavior?
- What useful concepts can behavioral scientists provide so that we can more effectively analyze on-the-job problems and devise better ways of handling them?

The "T" Group

The work in the "T" or "training group" was, by far, the most exciting for me. As mentioned previously, we went into the group "without portfolio"—that is, we had no rank, no desk to hide behind, no power to influence others with rewards and punishments. We had to stand by ourselves without "back home" props. The "T" groups had no topics as such—except the actions and reactions of the members to each other and the group process! Until you have been in one of these groups you should by no means laughingly discount it as ludicrous that something could be accomplished with, it seems, "nothing to talk about." Here are some of the things I drew from my group experience:

1. **Administrators Are Paid To Resolve Conflicts.** (If you cannot stand the heat get out of the kitchen.*)

Conflict, and the resolution of conflict, is an inevitable, built-in part of an administrative job—but some of us try to deny they exist. Somehow, there is a necessity to maintain the image of a "smooth-running shop" at all costs. Perhaps, we are overly concerned with making the proper impression, or unsure as to whether we can handle the feelings we have, and others might have, about the conflicts we try to gloss over.

This leads us to ignoring problems that should be resolved. Conflicts do not mean poor administration. Those who regard the normal quota of conflicts as indicators of poor administration become irritable in handling conflicts, or attempt to ignore their existence—instead of identifying and resolving conflicts in a healthy way.

---

* Harry S. Truman

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

2. Failure To Consider Feelings in Making Decisions.

Too many of us fail to recognize our own feelings and the feelings of others, in working with groups of people or individuals In groups, feelings are major factors in behavior and should be carefully considered by anyone in a group leadership role. Too often feelings are repressed so that a little pingpong ball game is going on on the top of the table—and some heavy bowling balls are being rolled on people's toes underneath the table! This kind of meeting is really conducted on two levels. On one level are the ostensible meanings of what is said, and on another level are the real feelings and attitudes of the participants.

3. Getting Excited about Things Outside of the Major Area of Conflict.

Often sublimated feelings about group problems are channeled off into other areas so that relatively minor items become major issues with inordinate emotional reaction. This happens when Item 4 on the agenda suddenly becomes an unforeseen major issue, mainly because it has riding on it a number of other group attitudes and feelings only indirectly connected with Item 4 itself. Yet, the group discusses Item 4 with fervor, because this is a safe area for their other feelings that they are timid about expressing openly.

4. Trust Brings Feelings Out in the Open.

People who do not trust each other tend to suppress feelings and thoughts at meetings. This puts the administration in the position of "flying blind" in decision making. The administrator makes a decision with only a limited amount of data—thus, increasing the possibilities of error.

5. Our Attitude That Open Expression of Feeling Is a Weakness.

I think it is fair to say that our society places a premium on stolidity, and regards expression of feeling as a weakness—in a man especially. This, perhaps, is a misinterpretation of the respect tendered the leader who shows calmness under stress. A leader can be calm, yet state emphatically his feelings about an issue to which he is committed. Also, a leader who expresses this deep commitment is more likely to inspire his followers. Nonetheless, people who are concerned about the impression they

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

make on others and the group leader, do not reveal themselves and continually worry about how much it is "safe" to reveal. In my experience at Bethel, after members of the group had expressed their real feelings and attitudes about problems they had on the job, many were embarrassed and felt impelled to ask the group whether they would hire him (or her) if he or she came looking for a job. Thus, it appears, that we sometimes are so concerned with making a good impression, that we gloss over our problems and our feelings and do not face up to them in a way that is healthy for ourselves and the total organization.[2]

6. Is Anyone Totally Objective?

Many of us feel that the perfect administrator is a person who is totally objective and "professional" in the handling of the on-the-job problems. We even point the finger at those involved in problem situations and wonder why they cannot be quite as objective as we are. We even say this to others or ourselves with a great deal of fervor. At that point we ought to pause and clearly recognize that we have feelings invested in this situation and are only fooling ourselves if we do not recognize these feelings.

7. Suppression of Feelings—Its Effect on Others.

When we attempt to suppress our feelings and present the image of the totally objective administrator, we make ourselves relatively cold individuals that are unable to respond in a positive way to people who have difficulty, or to people who are doing a good job and should be praised. The man who is unable to recognize and express his discomfiture about an administrative problem is also probably unable to express his or her feelings when something laudable is achieved.

8. Our Authoritarian Backgrounds.

Partly because we are brought up within families that have primarily an authoritarian structure,[3] we tend to look to others to carry the burden of responsibility and leadership. (For this reason, in Bethel, we periodically looked to the "T" group trainer

[2] Feelings unexpressed have a way of coming out elsewhere on objects or people only indirectly connected with a problem situation. If these are not expressed outwardly there are sometimes somatic effects such as ulcers, high blood pressure, etc.

[3] See such writers as Malinowski on societies with *different* structures from our, i.e. *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*.

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

to "tell us" what we should do.) This means that we should recognize within ourselves, and within members of the staff, that there is a background of family experience that would tend to lead us to periodically "pass the buck" when we are under stress and should be taking full share of responsibility for a problem on our own shoulders.

9. The Concept of Shifting Leadership.

Who is a leader in a group? In our group all of us, including myself, were leaders on a day-to-day basis. Within the group leadership was, at first, struggled for in many ways, because we felt uneasy unless we (each of us) had control over what happened. We soon learned that perhaps leadership is a thing of the moment—that different people at different times come up with appropriate statements and insights that move the group ahead. For many of the reasons outlined in this paper, we have not tapped into the potential sources of leadership in our own staffs. Though ultimately we have to make the decision, in many cases we certainly can depend more upon others to come forward with effective ideas.

10. Some of Our Leadership Concepts.

Too often our concepts of leadership are hindered by such elements as the following:

- An unwillingness to recognize the need for the help of our associates, since we interpret the need for help as a sign of weakness.
- Associating objectivity and impassivity with strength.
- Our need to feel indispensible by not sharing problems or projects with others.
- Too readily accepting people who want to lean on us to an inordinate degree. (This supports our concept of our own strength, but does it establish a healthy initiative on the part of the person who develops such a relationship?)

11. Defending Yourself and Being Defensive.

All people develop ways of defending their egos against assault. In our group at Bethel we differentiated between *defenses* and *defensiveness*. We used defensiveness to describe those behaviors of individuals that tend to rationalize and/or reject the persistent realities of problem situations, thus making it extremely difficult

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

for the individual to cope with the real problems. I suppose that a professional in this area (psychologist, or psychiatrist) might quibble with these terms, but I find them helpful in thinking about human behavior. One way of looking at the situation would be to imagine a person reacting to reality on a continuum that might start to the left with "defending yourself" and move to the right to a point labelled "being defensive." I suppose all of us would be at different places on this continuum at different times. If we react in a defensive way *every* time we face a problem that reflects on our competence, we seriously interfere with our coming to grips with problems realistically and effectively.

12. The Distance Between Our Public and Private Personalities. Too often our public or group personality is far distant from our private personality. Our discussion in the "T" group led us to hypothesize that if X-1 (private personality) is too distant from X-2 (public personality), there are serious implications for mental health. One person in the group had tremendously high blood pressure that had no physical explanation—except the fact that he had played a role on his job far too distant from the real or private personality. On this job he was called upon to be a peace-maker for a highly authoritarian principal. Individuals were fearful of approaching the principal when they were upset about something or disagreed with an administrative action. They went to him, the assistant principal, to talk out their problems and he, as a peace-maker, felt he could not express his own feelings in such conferences. In the group, however, he felt very relaxed and was quite free in expressing abrasive viewpoints on subjects that came up for discussion. The tremendous pressure and sublimation necessary to maintain his on-the-job role was much too distant from his real personality and probably was detrimental to his mental health.

13. What Kind of Education Really Changes Human Behavior? The aim of our "T" group experience was to get us to re-examine seriously our patterns of behavior in groups and with other people and to bring in new ways or try new ways of doing this in a relatively safe environment. As observed in the group, any individual, re-examining in a very fundamental way his view of the outside world, went through a period that called for con-

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

siderable thought and integration, not unlike a ship coming out of a storm. The proof of change, however, was in his behavior in the group and whether the change "took" so that it resulted in "on-the-job" changes at home.

This brings up the whole question of what kind of education *really causes us to change.* Do simple intellectual verbalisms (and many of us are guilty of these in teaching) really mean that we have a fundamental change in outlook that will result in a fundamental change in behavior?

14. Communication Is More than Talk.

Many of us fail to note the cues that are sent out to us in groups or on a face-to-face basis. Our tendency is to minimize the total message sent out by the eyes, lips, posture, body movements, tone of voice, etc. The above are all part of human communication that we should be sensitive to and attempt to understand. Silence is *in itself* an eloquent communication!

Our Afternoon Sessions on Theory and Role-Playing

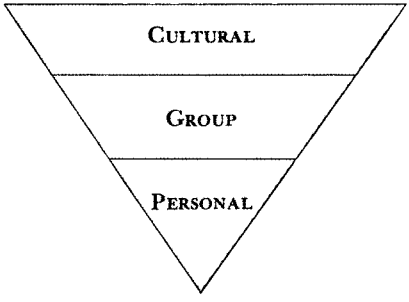
In addition to our "T" group experience at Bethel, we had afternoon sessions in which we discussed some of the work of behavioral scientists. We had a library open to us with books in this field, a notebook of material in this area, and we spent quite a bit of time in role-playing, in analyzing our activities and reactions. From this experience several "models" emerged that I feel might help some of us in understanding problems and resolving them. Here are some of these models:

1. The Triangle of Problem Elements.

One way of looking at organizational conflicts is to regard them as having elements of conflict in three broad areas. We saw a film "Twelve Angry Men" in which, as you may recall, a boy was acquitted of the accusation that he had killed his father. In our discussion of this film, we analyzed the conflict between Henry Fonda and the other members of the jury. We tried to see which viewpoint of the jurors tended to be based upon cultural factors, which viewpoints were based upon other interactions within the group, and which viewpoints were based upon personal experience. The following is the visual model that we used for our analysis:

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

THE TRIANGLE OF PROBLEM ELEMENTS



Some of the jury members believed that the boy had to be guilty because he was "one of those people" who were "not to be trusted" since he was a "foreigner" (not Anglo-Saxon in extraction). This would fall under the cultural area.

One member of the group opposed the guilty vote because he was an old man and felt that he should assert himself by taking a firm stand, and thus show the disrespectful younger members of the group that an old man could have courage and make his influence felt. This would fall largely in the group area.

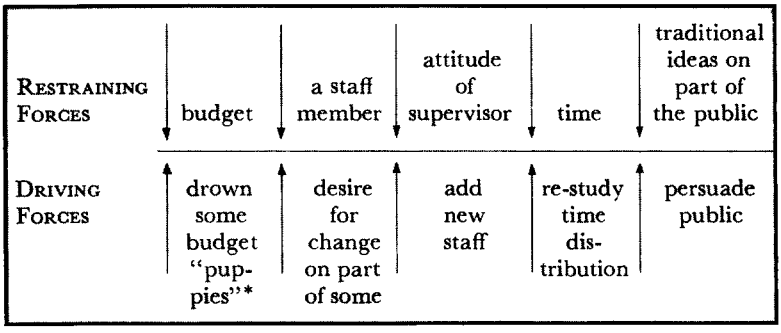
One member of the group wanted the boy executed, and it was clear that he harbored a great deal of resentment towards boys who did not turn out the way their fathers thought they should. It was evident that he was reacting in the personal area of our model, since his own son had deserted him.

2. The Force Field Model.

Most of us are "change agents" of sorts. That is, we periodically come forward with ideas that will result in a change in the "existent state of things" (what Kurt Lewin referred to as "quasi-stationary equilibrium"). If one regards an organization in a state of balance, or frozen, then one must analyze these forces which are restraining forces and tend to keep these in equilibrium —or the way they are now. Then one must also analyze those forces that one can increase to change these. These are the "driving forces." These are the things we can do to get this unfrozen. By increasing the strength of the driving forces, or adding additional driving forces, or removing some of the restraining forces, we can get change going (unfreeze), and then we can go back to a new state of equilibrium (frozen again!).

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

FORCE FIELD MODEL



3. The Necessity of Feedback.

All of us ought to analyze how we encourage or discourage feedback. Do we get *all* the information prior to making a decision and, once it has been made and is in operation, how do we get data to modify or improve its application? In other words, are we tapped into the sources of information on staff reactions or are we getting only garbled information on "front line" situations, and making inaccurate, ineffective decisions due to inadequate and incorrect information?

A great deal of the quality and quantity of information that we get depends upon how approachable we make ourselves. We make ourselves approachable in one way by having the kind of relationship with staff that make contact a relatively relaxed experience, and we make ourselves more approachable by placing ourselves in situations where we can be approached in a less formal way (faculty rooms, lunch, hallways, etc.)

4. The Persuader-Resistor Situation.

Most of us are called upon to meet people on a face-to-face basis and persuade them to do something or to change their mind about something. The resistor has certain ostensible reasons that he or she presents for being unable or unwilling to do what the persuader wants done. One thing the persuader must do is find out, or perceive prior to the conference, what are the more fundamental reasons for resistance to an idea. Unless he comes to

* This originated with Charles Wagner, Asst. Superintendent for Business, Darien.

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

grips with this the persuader does not know what are the telling arguments that he can bring to bear to balance off the fundamental arguments of the resistor. The persuader also must determine from the outset what are the fundamental areas of *agreement* between him and the resistor.

For example: A principal might be interested in a teacher helping in an after-school activity. The teacher might be fundamentally resisting because the principal has failed to properly appreciate, in the past, some of the other contributions that the teacher has made above and beyond the call of duty. The teacher, on the other hand, presents arguments about lack of time, etc., rather than expressing his or her feeling about the fundamental issue. The principal seeks fundamental areas of agreement, such as the dedication of both individuals, the best interests of pupils, and the revival of an effective after-school program that had, at one time, been quite effective. He also states, sincerely and emphatically, his appreciation for the teacher's past efforts.

Summary

I hope that this report will be helpful to administrators and teachers who want to understand more effectively some of the key elements that go into working with other people. The administrator should be able to use these ideas in working with other administrators and his or her teaching staff. The teacher should be able to use them in doing a more effective job since the teacher *must* be able to communicate with pupils, and understand their communication!

Some of the ideas, especially the "models" at the end of this report, might seem to have a Machiavellian perspective. I suppose that we should freely admit that the administrator is periodically forced to stand-off and take a beady-eyed look also at the forces at work in a situation. It is important to note that I did not intend to say that we should condemn those who, for example, oppose a change for "childish" (in our opinion) reasons. On the contrary, I tried to convey that we should accept these elements as realistic elements of the situation, and the feelings of the opposing forces as human—and not arbitrarily label them as "childish" and of no consequence. Any administrator who passes human feeling off in a highhanded way will probably find trouble as a result of this "Olympian" view.

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016

Indeed, I have tried to say to the administrator, try to understand, not to condemn, the elements of opposition and accept *what is* as *what is.* I have also tried to point out that we are not free of subjective views or of feelings. We should carefully examine *our own* emotional investment in a conflict situation.

I also hope that this report is not taken as another series of bromides on, to paraphrase a recent Broadway musical, "How to Manipulate People and Succeed in Education Without Really Trying." On the contrary, some of the underlying concepts, if applied, will lead to more trust, more openness, and understanding within a school staff.

Downloaded from bul.sagepub.com at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY on June 4, 2016